

Message Text

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SUBJECT: STATE SECURITY COURT BEGINS TRIAL OF BEN SALAHISTS

REF: TUNIS 3873

1. SUMMARY: ON JUNE 13 THE STATE SECURITY COURT BEGAN
THE GOT'S TRIAL OF 33 PERSONS ASSOCIATED WITH AHMED
BEN SALAH WHO ARE ACCUSED OF VARIOUS CRIMES OF SUBVERSION.
BEN SALAH AND FIVE OTHERS ARE BEING TRIED IN ABSENTIA
WHILE THE REST OF THE ACCUSED WERE PRESENT IN COURT FOR
THE OPENING SESSION IN WHICH THE PRESIDING JUDGE READ
THE GOVERNMENT'S INDICTMENT. DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN PRESS
PLUS A NUMBER OF FOREIGN OBSERVERS WERE ALSO PRESENT.
TRIAL IS EXPECTED TO LAST APPROXIMATELY ONE WEEK. END SUMMARY.
2. OPENING SESSION OF BEN SALAHISTS' TRIAL ON JUNE 13
WAS DEVOTED TO READING OF GOT'S INDICTMENT. IT ALLEGED
THAT THE GEN SALAHISTS SOUGHT TO OVERTHROW THE REGIME
BY ILLICIT MEANS UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF BEN SALAH IN
SWITZERLAND. THE INDICTMENT IDENTIFIED BRAHIM MAYDER
AS THE PERSON WHO PERSONALLY MET WITH BEN SALAH IN
SWITZERLAND AND WHO WAS IN CHARGE OF COORDINATING THE
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MOVEMENT'S ACTIVITIES IN TUNISA. IT SAID THAT THEY
SOUGHT TO FORM CELLS IN TUNISIA AND DREW UP POLITICAL
TRACTS. THE CHARGES SPECIFICALLY CITED
THE "MANIFESTO OF THE MOVEMENT OF POPULAR UNITY" (SEE
TUNIS A-41) MY 13, 1975) AS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS ILLEGAL
ACTIVITY. THE INDICTMENT ALSO NOTED THAT THE ACCUSED
WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR PREPARATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF

VARIOUS OTHER TRACTS THAT GAVE A "TOTALLY NEGATIVE" IMAGE OF TUNISIA AND CONTAINED DEFAMATORY STATEMENTS ABOUT THE CHIEF OF STATE AND MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT. PRINTING OF THESE TRACTS WAS ACCOMPLISHED, THE INDICTMENT READ, ON A PRESS THAT WAS BROUGHT FROM PARIS AND HIDDEN IN THE HOUSE OF YOUSSEF NASRI (ONE OF THE ACCUSED). THE INDICTMENT ALLEGED THAT THE TRACTS WERE A DIRECT INCITEMENT TO REVOLUTION. THE INDICTMENT CLAIMED THAT THE BEN SALAHISTS HAD LARGE SUMS OF MONEY AT THEIR DISPOSAL AND WERE DIRECTING OPERATIONS OF CELLS IN TUNIS, AS WELL AS IN SOUSSE, SFAX, JENDOUBA AND IN OTHER CITIES.

3. FOREIGN OBSERVERS IN TUNIS FOR BEN SALAHISTS' TRIAL ARE FROM THE PARIS, ZURICH AND GENEVA BAR ASSOCIATIONS, FROM THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF CATHOLIC JURISTS, THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEMOCRATIC JURISTS AND FROM THE INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR THE RIGHTS OF MAN. AMONG THE OBSERVERS ARE PROFESSOR RICHARD FALK OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY AND IKBAL AHMED OF THE INSTITUTE OF POLITICAL STUDIES IN WASHINGTON.

4. IN OPENING REMARKS AT TRIAL PRESIDING JUDGE MADE POINT THAT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION WAS NOT IN QUESTION IN TRIAL AND STATE SECURITY COURT JUDGED ONLY ACTS OF SUBVERSION. HE PROMISED THAT RIGHTS OF THE ACCUSED WOULD BE SCRUPULOUSLY RESPECTED.

5. ALL PAPERS GAVE MAJOR COVERAGE TO TRIAL INCLUDING A GROUP PHOTOGRAPH OF THE ACCUSED IN COURT. SEMI-INDEPENDENT UNCLASSIFIED

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LE TEMPS EXPANDED ON GOT PRESS AGENCY RELEASE ON TRIAL, QUOTING THE PRESIDING JUDGE'S OPENING REMARKS AND GIVINO THE NAMES OF DEFENSE LAWYERS AND FOREIGN OBSERVERS. MULCAHY

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